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UNCLAS SAN SALVADOR 002198

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT GETTING WORKERS UP AND OUT 30 MINUTES  
EARLIER TO CONSERVE FUEL USE

1. On June 8, President Sacca announced the formation of a public-private sector "National Emergency Commission" to identify ways to mitigate the impact of high global petroleum prices. On July 22, the government announced that it would implement four measures to reduce traffic congestion and thereby conserve fuel use. As a result, a large part of the public sector work force in San Salvador was required to report to work 30 minutes earlier today, the first day back at work for residents of the capital following the August 3-6 holidays.

2. The changes, which took effect today for a two-month trial period, include:

a. advance work hours at central government ministries by 30 minutes. In July, the Ministry of Economy said that 30 percent of the 78,000 public employees in San Salvador commute by private vehicle; changing the work schedule for the central government (autonomous agencies, the Supreme Court and the legislative branch are not covered by the measures) means that 23,000 vehicles will be on (and off) the roads earlier, improving traffic flow. Government employees will work from 7:30 to 3:30 rather than from 8:00 to 4:00;

b. remove 500 old buses from roads in the center of the city, relocate bus stops, and limit cargo transport during rush hour (comment: private sector sources assert that old buses have not yet been demobilized and question the government's ability to carry through on this commitment);

c. deploy police at strategic traffic points in the city of San Salvador to manage traffic; and

d. develop a plan to broadcast traffic accident information to motorists.

3. The National Emergency Commission is composed of the Ministers of Labor, Economy, and Public Works, the Vice Minister of Transport in the Public Works Ministry, the national police director, and the presidents of the National Private Enterprise Association (ANEP), the Salvadoran Industrialists Association (ASI), Fusades (think tank), and the Salvadoran Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In implementing the measures put in place today, the GOES has moved on a number of the proposals proposed in the commission, although others - including moving the clock up - have not been endorsed. While generally supportive of the government's changes, the private sector organizations involved have been conservative about adopting changes in their work schedules and, in private, some have criticized the government for not doing more to relieve the pinch of energy prices. In an August 8 conversation with emboff, the analyst at a key association rebuked the government for the limited scope of measures being considered, emphasizing his association's longstanding call for greater exploitation of hydropower resources (comment: part of a policy approach which also includes pressure on government to bear down on expensive thermal electricity generators), incentives for renewable energy, and measures to (once and for all) rationalize the provision of bus transport to the public. Unscientific soundings indicated that traffic conditions were no easier today, the first day of government's revised work hours.

Barclay